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ABSTRACT

This document is a summary of presentations and strategies offered at the 1986 National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education. The conference, organized by the Action Agenda Project and co-sponsored by the National University Continuing Education Association, explored the educational needs of rural adults and designed strategies to support rural educational efforts. The summary includes mention of economic development projects undertaken by Native Americans who are concerned about the devaluation of their culture by current educational systems. Presentations advocated linking rural education and local economic development more closely, and included several examples of such links. Conference presenters suggested that specific programs are best proposed and developed by rural communities themselves. An "Agenda for Future Work" includes a list of priorities for responding to rural educational needs, empowering rural learners, and promoting change. Executive summaries of three papers presented at the conference, lists of staff, participating organizations, other publications, and a call to establish a national clearinghouse to support improvement in adult education in rural areas are included in the proceedings. (TES)

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Proceedings 1986

National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education

September 7–9, 1986
Airlie, Virginia

The Action Agenda for Rural Adult Postsecondary Education

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ACTION AGENDA

RC 016675

National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education

Proceedings 1986

Amidst the collapse of resource-based economies and the increasingly diverse populations now found in rural communities, rural people's educational needs have become multiple and diverse. The National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education capped nearly five years' work in exploring these needs and designing strategies to support educational efforts underway in rural areas. From the exploratory work in 1981 to a series of four regional conferences sponsored in 1985 to the conference summarized in these proceedings, the Action Agenda Project has sought to involve an ever-widening range of educational providers and organizations in its deliberations. The priorities adopted by the conference reflect this diversity, presenting an agenda for future work that can be shared among those concerned with the future of rural America.

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Foreword

Economic and demographic changes have been very disruptive to rural America. Advances in technology and the industrialization of the economy have caused an evolution in our work force, disrupted traditional economies, and left rural Americans wondering whether they will survive—let alone prosper. For those caught up in the crisis, education offers help—in assessing options, developing new skills, even creating new economic opportunities.

Conferences like this are important in developing responses to the educational needs of rural Americans. The diversity of educational institutions and organizations represented throughout the conference demonstrates the earnestness with which the educational community views its responsibilities. The topics explored underscore the need for change, both in educational programs and the delivery mechanisms used to respond to rural needs. The proceedings synthesize the conference sessions and present a series of priorities for continued work on behalf of rural education.

Congressman Pat Williams
Democrat, Montana

The National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education

by Jacqueline D. Spears

Change occurs gradually, as the images of a few take on meaning for many. In 1981, 28 rural educators gathered in Kansas City to reflect on the problems they faced in improving rural access to continued education. Five years later, more than a hundred rural educators, national association representatives, policy makers, and rural learners gathered in rural Virginia to define better the agenda for continued work on behalf of rural adults. Rural concerns once expressed by a few had become rural differences acknowledged by many. The hope for alliance voiced by a few rural educators some five years earlier had become a call for a national clearinghouse. The rural lifelong learning movement had come of age.

Known officially as "The National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education," the meeting was organized by the Action Agenda Project and co-sponsored by the National University Continuing Education Association (NUCEA). The conference received financial support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Farm Foundation, The Ford Foundation, Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc., and NUCEA. The Division of Continuing Education at Kansas State University provides an administrative home for the Action Agenda Project's work.

The conference drew people from 35 states to share, consult, and plan a future agenda for work on behalf of rural postsecondary education. Some participants were experienced rural educators, seeking strategies for dealing with the day-to-day problems of extending services to rural areas. Others came from professional associations, wanting to understand the barriers faced by rural people. Still others represented the state and federal agencies whose policies influence the distribution of the nation's educational resources. And finally, some were the very adults on behalf of whom the conference was held—rural learners who knew the long commute, the limited class offerings, and the need for attention to persistent rural problems.

The conference was designed to be a working conference, drawing upon the knowledge and experience of all who participated. Position papers commissioned for the conference set the first day's agenda. Early sessions addressed the why (for empowerment and in support of economic development) and the how (with the intelligent use of technology and drawing upon collaborative strategies) of rural adult education. Discussions of finance and policy issues led to a sobering acknowledgement of the limited power base from which rural people must act. Closing sessions asked conference participants to identify priorities to improve rural access to postsecondary education and to build an agenda from which to address those priorities. Drawing upon the structure of the conference agenda, these proceedings will examine: (1) the role of postsecondary education in rural life, (2) the educational developments seen as being most helpful to increasing rural access, (3) the realities of current finance and policy limitations, (4) the barriers facing rural adults who seek continued education, and (5) the agenda for future work on behalf of rural postsecondary education.

The Why: Empowerment and Economic Development

If you ask most rural residents what's on their minds, it's economic survival. What was once a timber problem or a grain commodity problem has now become a natural resources problem. Economic downturns once thought to be regional fluctuations have become national trends as rural economies fail. For the rural people whose lives are woven deeply into the fiber of our lands, these trends translate into a struggle to survive. Helping people deal with this struggle is one goal of education.

Seeing economic trends in terms of their impact on individuals compels us to examine economic development from the perspective of rural empowerment—a second theme expanded upon in the opening sessions of the conference. Whether it be the natural resources drawn from the lands or the human resources drawn from the communities through urban migration, rural America has long subsidized urban growth. In exchange for their efforts, "rural citizens today remain more poor, more shoddily housed, less gainfully employed, more vulnerable to illness . . . less educated and less literate than their metropolitan counterparts," in the words of Dick Margolis, noted journalist and rural advocate. Rural people lack more than an economic base—they lack a sense of national rural consciousness from which to work towards improved economic conditions.

Ethnostress and Enlightenment

In the conference's opening address, John Mohawk of the Seventh Generation Fund examined the empowerment issues raised by the experiences of more than one million Native American people living on 400 rural reservations. Efforts at economic development done *for* Native Americans have failed. Efforts at economic development done *by* Native Americans are underway, but face the formidable barriers erected by what Mohawk called "ethnostress."

Mohawk defined ethnostress as the set of behaviors an ethnic group adopts in reaction to discrimination or ethnic abuse. Having begun education in classrooms designed to assimilate the Indian culture, Indian children learned that their culture was "not worth much." They internalized the message, developing a set of behaviors and actions that reaffirmed the message. Current efforts at economic development are blocked by these behaviors, by a people convinced that they can't succeed. The challenge facing education is to help restore the dignity and self-respect of the Indian people—in the words of Mohawk, "to help Indian people survive and prosper as Indian people."

Using the term "enlightenment" rather than "empowerment," Dick Margolis affirmed the relevance of the Native American experience for rural people in general. From a broader cultural context, ethnostress is the "paralyzing conviction that one's place in society is pre-determined, permanent, and paradoxically, one's own darned fault." It leads to a sense of fatalism that can be self-fulfilling. The antidote? Margolis called for education that is democratic and poetic. Planned in partnership with rural people, adult education must respond to the economic, social, emotional, and civic demands of rural life. Lest we forget the effect of ethnostress, Margolis also called for an education that reaffirms the sense of dignity and purpose in rural life. The poetry—the images, feelings, and perspectives whose expression in art and literature reaffirms the values in rural life—are as important as the economic development and vocational training so frequently mentioned. The goal of education ought to be "to help rural people survive and prosper as rural people."

Knowledge-Based Rural Development

If empowerment is the spirit, then economic development is the substance of rural survival. Historically, the development of natural resources served as the blueprint for rural economic development. Rural areas were rich in natural resources; urban areas were rich in need—the rural/urban symbiosis flourished. Increased productivity and international markets have altered things significantly. Today, natural resource-based economies are in serious decline. The survival of many rural communities now rests with diversifying their economic base and making more effective use of human resources.

The next conference session explored the link between education and rural economic development, sharing concepts as well as effective models. Individuals invest in education in hopes of greater earnings and society in hopes of greater productivity. But as Daryl Hobbs, a rural sociologist from the University of Missouri, pointed out, a healthy return on those investments depends on a mobile work force. Individuals must be willing to move to where their skills are in demand. Hobbs again: "Evidence is clear that rural Americans have taken the presumed linkage between economic well-being and getting an education every bit as seriously as their urban counterparts." But for rural youth, "economic opportunity was always located somewhere else."

Having watched their youth migrate and their economic base collapse, rural communities seek more than quick fixes to their immediate crisis. Today, many emphasize "knowledge-based development"—job creation rather than smokestack chasing, entrepreneurship rather than vocational skill acquisition, value-added agriculture rather than increased productivity. In order to succeed, these strategies will demand a link between education and rural economic development that is, in the words of Hobbs, "more locally relevant."

Local Relevance

Successful models shared at the conference illustrate some facets of what is meant by "more locally relevant" links between education and rural economic development. Bill Gillis of Pennsylvania State University described strategies used by Cooperative Extension to develop the capacity of local leaders to plan and implement economic development efforts. Whether the strategy selected involves economic analysis, downtown revitalization, or the retention and expansion of existing companies, the process emphasizes collecting and analyzing local information. John Zippert from the Federation of Southern Cooperatives discussed the link between a community and its members, arguing that conventional education seeks to develop individuals in isolation from the needs of their communities. Cooperatives pool member resources to create new businesses, jobs, and economic growth. Educational programs then respond to the needs of the individual within the context of the cooperative. Arlene Hetherington of the Northern California Higher Education Consortium described the extent to which economic development strategies like tourism require community-wide approval. Trade-offs between the economic activity stimulated by tourism and the potential damage that can be done to public lands have to be examined.

So what role does education play in knowledge-based development? Conference participants came away with a view of rural economic development that was, in the words of Helen Roberts of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), "community-based and feasibly structured within local resources and environments." These features require educational programs planned in partnership with rural communities, responsive to the sometimes short-term or immediate needs of adults, and more conscious of the link between education and community efforts at economic development.

If rural people are to survive and prosper as rural people, they need access to an educational system that respects them and responds to their needs within the context of the local communities in which they live. The role of postsecondary education ought to be to empower rural people in the broadest sense of the word—to enable rural people to express the value and meaning they derive from rural life as well as gain the knowledge and skills required to make an economic contribution to their communities.

The How: Technology and Collaborative Strategies

If empowerment and economic development explain the "why," then technology and collaboration address the "how" of rural postsecondary education. The barrier that stands between rural people and the educational resources they need is a result of too much distance and too few people. Strategies for overcoming this barrier blend both modern and traditional possibilities. Some pin their hopes on technology, believing that telecommunications will shrink the distances and aggregate the people. Others find technology "un-rural," preferring to promote the collaborative strategies needed to make existing resources stretch a bit further. Both strategies were explored in subsequent conference sessions.

Distance Education

Acknowledging that technology has shaped and reshaped the rural economy and social structure, Mary Emery explored the extent to which distance technology has the potential to "reshape the structure and content of rural education." Clearly our sense of space has been altered by telecommunications—remote Eskimo villages are linked to the urban centers of their state; rural school language classes watch German television shows. Distance technology seems to offer a promising solution to the perennial rural problem of too much space and too few people. Educational costs can be decreased by expanding the potential audience, aggregating the population. What remains to be seen is whether these potentials can be realized in *rural* terms. Conference sessions explored the "who" and the "what" of distance education—who really gets served and what knowledge gets transferred.

Despite the hope that distance education can improve rural access, the "who" of high tech learning is most probably the already well educated, urban adult. Most research acknowledges the extent to which technology threatens to widen rather than close the gap between the well educated and the undereducated. Some practitioners wondered about the extent to which the same could be said about the educational gap between urban and rural areas. Folded into the question of who gets served are issues related to: (1) the social needs of rural people, (2) the literacy that the learner must bring to any high-tech learning experience, and (3) the rural infrastructure needed to ensure access.

Given the sense of isolation often expressed by rural people, conference participants wondered whether distance education could respond to the social needs of rural people. Dropout rates in high-tech courses often run higher than those in traditionally delivered courses. Mary Emery spoke of the extent to which high-tech delivery systems sometimes "strip the course experience of all the support systems commonly taken for granted . . . (like) peer groups for interpretation and the teacher for clarification." On the other hand, Joyce Elsner of Rio Salado Community College spoke of the social intimacy possible through teleconferencing, "where interactions can be stripped of the visual stereotyping so often present in face-to-face interactions." What emerged from the discussion was a sense that distance technology could serve rural people effectively, but that traditional courses need to be adapted, not simply delivered. Care must be taken to build social interactions into the structure of the course or use of the technology.

Technical Literacy

A second concern raised was the skills the learner must bring to high-tech courses. Distance learning assumes a sort of "technical literacy" on the part of learners—a familiarity with the technology that enables them to concentrate on the content and not the delivery mechanism. Videocassettes, television, and to some extent telephones offer familiar learning environments to the general audience, while computer-based technologies do not. Attempts to deliver education through technology must acknowledge the literacy required and select delivery strategies appropriate to the experience of the learners. Thus, as computer technologies become more and more integrated into modern living, programs designed to teach computer literacy must be extended to rural areas.

Needed Infrastructure

Lastly, distance education requires an infrastructure capable of supporting the technology. Learners and practitioners alike spoke from firsthand knowledge of the limited rural infrastructure. In some areas telephone lines are poor, restricting data transmission and audio-conferencing. Cable service is often nonexistent, restricting local video programming. Sue Fratkin of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) explored the impact of efforts to deregulate the communications industry. High telephone tariffs threaten to increase the cost of audio-conferencing, perhaps beyond the means of most educational institutions. Proposals to release ITFS channels to the entertainment industry threaten education's access to the airways. Local cable channels are now trying to break community access agreements. In the end, questions of access led to questions of policy—policy that would guarantee rural areas the physical and financial infrastructure needed to support distance education.

The "what" of distance education is in some respects no more complicated than the "what" of traditional education. Long burdened with curricula designed to respond to urban needs, rural learners and practitioners alike spoke of the need for programs developed in partnership *with* rural people. Mary Emery again: "Planning for developing and implementing distance delivery systems requires the involvement of rural residents as well as technicians, administrators, and faculty." Distance technology carries dangers inherent in its very strength—that the ability to span large distances will lead to homogenized instruction; that the costs to produce high quality programming will result in a national curriculum.

Models do illustrate strategies for ensuring that the who and what of distance education are translated into

rural terms. Bryan Spykerman of Utah State University described the Intermountain Community Learning and Information Services, a four-state effort designed to integrate modern telecommunications into rural libraries. Each site will use a community learning and information specialist, a local person trained to access resources in response to local needs. Joyce Elsner of Rio Salado Community College spoke of the use of audio-conferencing to provide outside contacts for homebound adults, alleviating rather than increasing the isolation they felt. These individuals are now asking for courses in vocational education and starting cottage industries. Dee Brock of the PBS Adult Learning Services encouraged providers to find locally relevant ways of using the National Narrowcast Service and EDSAT, the educational satellite.

Can the potentials of distance technology be realized in rural terms? Conference participants seemed to agree that the potentials were enormous but that the limitations were serious. Either the federal government or individual states must invest in the rural infrastructure needed to assure rural access to emerging technologies. Institutions must collaborate with one another to limit costs, involve rural people in developing and designing courses, develop strategies for providing access to other support services needed in conjunction with academic programs, and ensure that programs match the technological literacy of their audience. And rural people themselves must take advantage of any opportunity to develop skills in using modern telecommunications.

Establishing Educational Partnerships

Collaborative models offer a second strategy for the "how" of rural postsecondary education. But the need for collaboration runs far deeper than the pooling of resources or sharing of costs so frequently mentioned. Given the close link between individuals and their communities, rural people need access to educational programs that offer to serve the individual within the context of the local community. Given the diversity of agencies now serving rural areas, communities need strategies to reduce duplication of effort, territoriality, fragmentation, and discontinuity typically found. Given past failures, rural communities need strategies for ensuring that educational programs are more relevant to their needs. In short, communities must become partners with the educational institutions that serve them.

Robert Coker and Sylvia McLaurin of Bainbridge Junior College explored the community education facilitation model as one strategy for organizing a community "partner." A community board acts as the link into the community by assisting in "defining community needs, accessing funding sources within the community, and gaining community-wide support of educational efforts." An educational facilitator serves as the link to educational institutions, securing the resources needed to respond to community needs. While a number of agencies could serve as educational facilitator, Coker and McLaurin argued that the community college was best suited for the role. Created to provide accessible and accredited post-secondary programs in response to local needs, the community college best combines an understanding of the local community with broader regional, state, and national resources.

The models shared at the conference sessions explored a variety of partnerships. Sue Spencer, representing Robert Boyd of the University of North Dakota, described strategies being used to acquaint local communities with university resources. Tim Donovan of the Community Colleges of Vermont and Barbara Buzin of the Oklahoma Network of Continuing Higher Education described statewide collaborations. Coker and McLaurin shared still other examples, including regional efforts like Project Enlist (Educational Network Linking Institutions, Students, and Technology) in western Minnesota and statewide consortia in New York, Illinois, and New Hampshire.

Virtually every conference session referred to the need for collaboration between communities and the educational institutions that serve them as well as among the institutions themselves. Models like the community education facilitation model provide a framework for developing community partners, but examples of effective community organizations are relatively few. Collaboration among educational institutions seems to have spread more widely. Clearly, collaboration offers the agencies involved the opportunity to expand their resource base, become more efficient in responding to local needs, and develop more innovative solutions to local problems. As agencies become more adept at collaborating among themselves, rural communities must develop the local leadership needed to enable them to take their place as partners in the educational process.

The Reality: Finance and Policy Issues

Having examined the "why" and the "how," conference participants turned to the "why not?" In an age dominated by urban growth, rural people express frustration when finance and policy issues are raised. Urban growth seems a more efficient model for modern life. But the assumptions of one age have a way of turning into the mistakes of the next. And the benefits of urbanization may one day become the costs of overcrowding—costs already apparent in terms of crime rates, energy-intensive life-styles, and the ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. Policies that make educational resources available to all people, regardless of their place of residence, remain an important issue—for the future if not for the present.

Session presenters and respondents were candid in assessing finances and policies with regard to rural adult postsecondary education. "There are no policies and no finances with regard to rural postsecondary education at the state level!" reported John Brown, state senator from South Dakota. "There is no policy at the federal level that addresses rural postsecondary education," added Chris Bolton, legislative director

for Senator Robert Dole of Kansas. The federal government has been sensitive to the special problems rural people face, as reflected in the current amendments with regard to how need for financial aid is calculated for children from farm families. But ultimately, education is seen as a state issue.

Policies reflect values; and, as Chris Bolton pointed out, no policy is itself a policy. Both states and the federal government need compelling reasons to intervene. For the federal government, compelling reasons emerge if rural people are seen to be economically disadvantaged. Improved access to postsecondary education is seen as a means to correct economic inequities. For states, compelling reasons are beginning to emerge from the collapse of many rural economies. John Brown emphasized the extent to which education is now tied to economic development. George Connick, University of Maine at Augusta, described efforts underway in response to a statewide study of economic development efforts. Maine is now committed to ensuring that all its residents have access to two years of postsecondary education study within 12 miles of their homes.

Barriers to Effective Policy and Financing

If compelling reasons to support rural postsecondary education are beginning to emerge, then what are the barriers to developing effective policy and financing strategies? Four specific barriers were addressed by the session presenters: (1) the gap between the cultures of rural society and society at large, (2) the lack of a voter constituency, (3) the lack of resources to allocate, and (4) the lack of educational leadership.

Paul Nachtigal, Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory, explored the gap between rural society and society at large. Rural society is tightly coupled, integrated, and dominated by generalists. Society at large is just the opposite—loosely coupled and specialized. This gap is further widened by the compartmentalization and specialization inherent in bureaucracies. Consequently, the policies that emerge from our governmental structures often impact rural areas negatively—more out of insensitivity than intent.

The second barrier mentioned was the lack of any voter constituency. John Brown pointed out that few rural adults are knocking on doors of state legislators asking for improved access to continuing education. Dwayne Matthews, of the New Mexico Commission on Higher Education, suggested that the constituency need not be rural. Improved access to continuing education is an *adult* issue, not an exclusively rural or urban issue. Adults need to be persistent in expressing their need for lifelong learning opportunities.

Other barriers emerged. Matthews again: "Much of the problem is the allocation of already scarce resources." No one has enough money to maintain existing systems, let alone build new systems. Even linking existing institutions to improve rural access can be expensive. Connick pointed out that Maine's commitment carries a price tag of 12 million dollars, not to create new programs but to provide the technology needed to link its rural population with existing programs. Limited resources pose a substantial barrier.

The lack of leadership within the educational community was the last barrier discussed. Colleges and universities face funding formulas that are volume driven, motivating them to reach out to urban rather than rural areas. Brown pointed out that some legislators are putting increased pressure on Cooperative Extension to focus their resources on just the agricultural community. As property values decline, rural schools find themselves struggling to maintain the K–12 program, let alone offer leadership to efforts at adult education. Community-based centers would seem ideal, but are too few and far between. No single provider seems able to step forward to assume leadership within the educational community.

Defining and Expressing Needs

What is needed? Matthews pointed out the need to be much more specific about programs. At a time when most states are running budget deficits, a cry for "taking education out to the masses" is not enough. The rural community must articulate its needs. All agreed that leadership at the state level would help. Brown proposed that a state coordinating agency be established to deal with rural postsecondary education. At the very least, Matthews countered, the discussion of rural needs must be broadened beyond continuing education. Central administrations or state coordinating bodies must be brought into the conversation. All agreed that solutions will have to emerge from within existing resources.

The reality facing rural areas is sobering. Limited finances coupled with policies that emerge from a bureaucratic system make it difficult for existing institutions to mount programs relevant to rural needs. As Matthews pointed out, legislators concern themselves with putting the necessary educational systems in place. But having the system does not ensure that rural needs will be met. The institutions that have the resources are themselves sometimes a barrier to meeting rural needs. In the words of Chris Bolton, we need policies that are people-driven, not institutionally driven.

Among the issues explored in conference sessions, finance and policy concerns prove the most difficult to translate into specific recommendations. At best, some general recommendations emerged. The issue of conflicting cultures means that we need to become more sensitive to the potential of a policy bias. State legislators and institutional leaders need to solicit and listen carefully to rural reactions to existing and proposed policies. Policies need to be broad enough to allow locally relevant structures or responses to their intent. And certainly, research which better defines and identifies policies that operate in a biased fashion is important to future policy development.

For rural people and educational providers alike, the recommendations are to be more vocal and specific in expressing needs to state legislatures. Within the context of the limited resources available to support education, calls for more education—especially from

the institutions themselves—will have little effect. Rural people *themselves* must make specific needs known to state offices and policy makers. Educational institutions must shift from being providers to becoming partners—learning to understand local problems and then helping communities design educational programs *specific* to those problems. Specific programs backed by rural people have the best chance of success.

The Learners: From Barriers to Affirmations

Drawing from information collected as part of two regional efforts, Dan Vogler from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Bill Gray from Washington State University shared perspectives on the barriers faced by rural adults in seeking access to postsecondary education. The study completed by the Appalachian Regional Initiative drew upon the resources of a steering committee representing six states and the various constituencies involved in rural postsecondary education. The Northwestern Regional Initiative called upon the resources of a similar group representative of their region and extended their survey to include educational providers and rural adult learners throughout the seven-state region.

Although the two studies examined barriers from different perspectives, their findings were remarkably similar. Rural adults report many of the same problems in continuing their education as those reported in the adult learner literature. But the common barriers of inconvenient class scheduling, family responsibilities, and time constraints were augmented by the rural problems of long commutes, poor road systems, bad weather, and geographic isolation. Rural adults share the need for strong family support of their decision to return to school, but add the need for community support as well. Rural adults also point to the limited courses available to them, the lack of information on class availability, and the lack of access to library, laboratory, and computer resources. In Appalachia, committee members added yet another barrier—the poor quality of secondary education that leaves adults ill-prepared for college work. Coupled with the low value that is sometimes placed on education in Appalachian communities, adults find it difficult to step out of conventional patterns.

Both studies offered recommendations—to states, to institutions, to educators, and to rural communities. For Appalachia, hope lay with increased public awareness of rural problems and broader based legislative support of rural concerns. Committee members suggested forming a center on rural adult education, to coordinate information and research on rural problems as well as to improve the social and political climate surrounding rural programs. In the Northwest, committee members made a number of recommendations. For states, the message was to develop resource allocation strategies and state-level coordination that recognizes and responds to rural needs. Institutions were encouraged to extend resources (both academic and student support services) to rural areas, while communities were invited to take a proactive role in articulating their needs and demanding relevant programs. Finally, practitioners were encouraged to abandon "turfs" and pursue consortial efforts in assessing needs, mounting programs, and providing student services.

Later sessions saw rural learners take on the proactive role suggested in the Northwest report. Rural learners issued a statement (see box) affirming their desire for education that empowers—education that enables them to gain the information and skills needed to survive and prosper.

Learner Statement

Statement made in report to the National Conference for Rural Adult Postsecondary Education, Airlie, Virginia, September 7–9, 1986.

We feel that:

1. Rural adults need to be involved in the empowerment process.

2. This empowerment process can be an educational process owned by the learner. Institutions should listen to the needs of the learner and the community.

3. Education should not be a painful process. Support services—day care, transportation, counseling, etc.—should be available.

4. The education the learner seeks should meet his/her economic, personal, or community needs.

5. A national conference should be held for adult learners. The themes of the conference should be:

a. Empowerment.

b. Inclusiveness—bringing together all adult learners, rural or urban, people of color and all cultures.

c. Support—so we can come into contact and continue to support each other and learn from one another.

6. Learners support the efforts to establish a clearinghouse and welcome the involvement and the opportunity to network with a variety of rural programs.

7. Learners support educational institutions in their efforts to meet the above goals.

The Agenda for Future Work

Having examined rural postsecondary education from a variety of perspectives, conference participants turned their attention to the future. Small groups met, discussed the needs and barriers they had heard expressed in earlier sessions, and developed a set of priorities for future work. More than 70 priorities were synthesized and refined into a final list of 25 priorities.

PRIORITIES

Respond to Rural Needs

Only two priorities dealt with specific content, namely literacy and economic development:

1. To establish as a national priority the elimination of rural illiteracy.

2. To define better the role of higher education in rural economic development.

Both have been persistent problems in some parts of rural America. Both have emerged recently as part of a national agenda in education. Past images have merged with present political agendas—at least for the moment.

Enhance Rural Practice

A second group of priorities addressed needs or suggested activities designed to enhance rural practice:

1. To establish a national clearinghouse on rural adult postsecondary education practices which could include activities related to: marketing, recruiting, needs assessments, model dissemination, and evaluation of programs.

2. To share information on various models for financing rural programs.

3. To develop communication channels among rural practitioners.

4. To develop a national organization that would continue to act as an advocate for rural adult education issues.

5. To forge coalitions with adult learning groups or other relevant constituencies to work on behalf of rural adult postsecondary education.

6. To clarify desired outcomes of rural adult postsecondary education through research that better defines rural adult learners' needs.

These priorities all relate to the information, skills, and networking opportunities important to those that serve rural adults—the educational providers scattered across the diverse agencies serving rural areas.

Empower Rural Learners

Another set of priorities focused more specifically on the learners themselves. These include involving rural adults in advocacy efforts, making adults part of the curriculum process, improving eligibility for financial aid, broadening the range of rural adults engaged in postsecondary education, and improving the student services available:

1. To engage rural adults in advocacy efforts on behalf of improved postsecondary education in rural areas.

2. To promote the development of consumer-focused educational programs and services.

3. To extend eligibility for financial aid to part-time learners.

4. To promote efforts to involve and educate the rural elderly.

5. To encourage rural high school students to pursue postsecondary education.

6. To establish a mechanism to serve total student needs, e.g., support services counseling.

Promote Educational Change

The last set of priorities called for changes in existing educational institutions and structures:

1. To develop university/college curricula that are more responsive to problems and more cost effective in reaching rural adults.

2. To promote the development of faculty reward systems and institutional incentives for increased community service.

3. To develop funding formulas for adult education as alternatives to traditional FTE formulas, e.g., a voucher system.

4. To increase the recognition of life experiences in lieu of formal academic course work in postsecondary education.

5. To provide incentives to encourage institutions to share educational information and resources.

6. To maximize use of state-of-the-art technology in rural education in order to: (a) teach technology and skills, and (b) overcome access problems.

7. State agencies need to assume responsibility for disseminating information on programs that serve rural adult learners.

Of immediate concern was the need to change curricula, faculty reward systems, funding formulas, the assessment/recognition of learning achieved through life experiences, the willingness of institutions to share/collaborate with one another, the use of technology, and the dissemination of information on available programs.

Where do we begin? In closing sessions, conference participants met in small groups to identify three to five priorities of most significance. The creation of a national clearinghouse or center emerged most consistently. The two priorities that dealt with content—literacy and economic development—emerged next. Among the remaining priorities, consensus was less clear. Improved curricula, use of technology, engaging rural adults in advocacy efforts, forging coalitions, developing new conceptual frameworks, and responding to total student needs emerged most frequently. As the conference drew to a close, Dick Margolis summed up the thoughts of many—the desire that we continue meeting, exchanging information, and working to shape a practical and humane agenda for rural postsecondary education. In a resolution adopted by the conference, the Action Agenda Steering Committee was asked "to lay the groundwork for a continuing enterprise, to report back to us, and to convene an organizing conference within the next 12 months."

Looking back on the hopes for alliance voiced some five years earlier, the rural lifelong learning movement has matured. Believing that rural solutions emerge from rural practice, practitioners seek a clearinghouse from which to share their success, understand their failures, and build a better knowledge base from which to serve rural people. Believing that they have a responsibility to rural as well as urban constituencies, national association representatives seek a structure that will enable rural practitioners and learners to have a voice—with associations, with state legislators, and with the federal government. Believing in themselves, rural people seek an education that empowers rather than enslaves—an education that enables them to survive and prosper as rural people, should they so desire.

Some Potentials and Limitations of Technology in Serving Rural Postsecondary Learners

Executive Summary

Demand for educational services in rural areas is increasing at the same time that revenue to support such programs is decreasing. Technology appears to offer a strategy with which to decrease the per unit cost of courses while expanding the potential audience for the programs. As a result, educational institutions and state legislatures look to technology as a solution to the problems faced in serving rural adult learners.

This paper takes the position that technology does not offer the solution that institutions and states might wish. Technology offers educators a tool with which to improve services to rural areas, but the manner in which that tool is used affects the access, equity, and quality extended to the rural adult. Current practice allows us to examine the potentials and limitations of this tool in serving rural adult learners.

At face value, technology would appear to increase rural access to postsecondary education. However, access is restricted if: (a) the learner is relatively inexperienced with technology, (b) the rural community does not have the infrastructure required to support the technology, and (c) the initial costs of hardware acquisition and curriculum revision are high. Current uses of technology often respond more to the needs of the already well educated, the technologically literate, or the more affluent learner. Consequently, the use of technology could widen the gap between the well educated and the undereducated and could further isolate communities with underdeveloped infrastructures. In implementing technology-based delivery systems, educational institutions must build in support services and design strategies that overcome these inequities.

While access and equity are important, the quality of the program is critical to the success of any outreach system. Long burdened with curricula designed to respond to urban needs, rural learners have been seeking more control over the programs made available to them. Different work environments and the community context within which educational needs must be assessed require that curriculum design and development efforts involve members of the rural communities. Current knowledge of effective learning environments also suggests that rural adults require some face-to-face contact with other learners or instructors and control over their learning activities.

Factors that contribute to the success of high-tech systems include: thorough planning, learner involvement in program development, access to support systems for learners, adequate funding and infrastructure, sufficient lead time, faculty development programs, and support for curriculum packaging and revision. Unsuccessful programs often have students learning without any structure of the learning environment, curriculum that has not been redesigned for distance delivery, lack of trained staff, lack of coordination among offerings, hardware acquisitions that weren't well planned for, and teachers who have not had an opportunity to overcome their technophobia.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations follow from this discussion:

- Distance delivery systems need to involve some face-to-face contact between learners and teachers.
- Planning for developing and implementing distance delivery systems requires the involvement of rural residents as well as technicians, administrators, and faculty.
- Planning for change includes evaluating both emerging and mature technologies to find the best tool for a specific need.
- Methods need to be developed to make campus support systems, such as financial aid information, counseling, career planning assistance, etc., available to learners off campus.
- Since literacy is being redefined to include the ability to use digital information to process, store, and communicate, programs that teach skills in handling this information need to be developed to bring this new literacy to rural learners.
- Funding for hardware/software needs to be matched 100% with money for training.
- State policy makers need to identify those groups who will be served by distance delivery systems and to develop policies to ensure rural learners have equity of opportunity and of educational outcome.
- Faculty development programs need to provide faculty with information on how to revise existing courses and develop new ones appropriate for distant learners.
- Institutions and groups need to develop more collaborative ways of working together to pool scarce resources for developing high tech systems and to ensure learners have access to an integrated curriculum.
- Institutions need to encourage and reward creativity and discovery among faculty, staff, and students.
- Concern for distant learners needs to be incorporated into all institutional planning.

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Knowledge-Based Rural Development: Adult Education and the Future Rural Economy

Executive Summary

The concept of human capital provides a structure from which to examine the link between post-secondary education and rural economic development. The concept specifies that the skills and abilities of human beings, over and above their physical effort as labor, are a contributing factor to economic growth. From this perspective, education becomes an investment made by each individual in hope of greater earnings and by the society in hope of greater productivity. Research conducted within this framework has used level of educational attainment as the measure of labor quality. Therefore much of what is known about return to human capital investment can more accurately be described as returns from investments in schooling.

This paper takes the position that rural localities and regions today can improve their prospects for both short-term and longer-term economic development by judicious and more locally relevant investments in their human capital. This position represents a departure from past norms of rural human resource development in three important ways: (1) it advocates a more conscious linkage of education and training investments with local and regional economic development efforts; (2) it pays greater attention to assessing and providing for the education and training needs of specific localities and regions; and (3) it directs more specific and conscious attention to the educational needs of adults.

Evidence is clear that rural Americans have taken the presumed linkage between economic well-being and getting an education every bit as seriously as their urban counterparts. The extent to which a high rate of return on investment in education rests with individual mobility has limited benefits reaped by rural communities. For rural youth, the link between education and economic opportunity has meant that they had to leave home and community. A history of one-way flow of human capital from rural areas has produced concentrations of productive capacity and population in metropolitan areas. For the localities that contributed about 45 percent of the total investment in education, the return on their investment has been little. In effect it is contended that rural communities have subsidized urban-based economic growth.

Faced with the current economic crisis, rural communities have again placed economic development high on the list of priorities. In seeking new directions and new forms of support for their economic development efforts, many are focusing on job creation in addition to, or instead of, attracting industry. Such a strategy, referred to as "knowledge-based development," shifts the emphasis to the education of adults rather than youth and to programs tailored to the locality rather than society.

Rural adult education programs must provide training in skills linked to the immediate and specific features of the community's economic development efforts in addition to the broader training valued by society in general. Programs offering support to business entrepreneurs, either through entrepreneurship seminars or small business incubators, are illustrative of this shift in emphasis.

While the need for continuing education exists among all adults, there are some categories of rural people for which additional education might pay particularly high dividends for rural communities. Rural areas retain a higher proportion of adults who are either illiterate or largely unskilled. Consequently, effective methods of adult basic education need to be implemented. There is a major need to provide training programs to assist displaced farmers to enter the non-farm economy. Rural women are entering the labor force at the same rate as urban women and need access to the education and training that would enable them to pursue more economically rewarding occupations. Postsecondary youth need access to training for self-employment or entrepreneurship that would enable them to use their skills in the rural setting. Lastly, rural communities differ from urban communities in their greater dependence on lay volunteer leaders. Educational programs that provide leadership training as well as ongoing seminars and informational support are needed.

Recommendations

This discussion suggests a number of policy initiatives that could support rural communities in knowledge-based development.

- Rural communities must have access to locally relevant and understandable information, as well as technical assistance in examining options. State governments and/or the public service functions of state universities would seem to be the logical providers of such support services.

- States need to encourage rather than discourage innovations in education that will facilitate closer collaboration between public education and the communities they serve.

- States need to review their economic development policies from the perspective of the different problems faced by rural communities. Additionally, they need to review how to link their educational programs with the economic development needs of small as well as large communities.

- State and federal programs need to provide for more effective targeting of services to rural communities, who are especially vulnerable to quick shifts in the economy.

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Notes Toward the Establishment of Educational Partnerships in Rural Communities

Executive Summary

While rural America was once a world apart from urban America, reverse migration in the 1970s and the decline in natural resource economies have contributed to a "rural" America that is becoming more and more like its urban counterpart. Consequently, adult needs for education in rural communities are not really so different from those of adults in urban communities. What sets rural adults apart is the need for education within the local context. Unless community needs are met, the education of the individual accomplishes only limited success.

Reviews of educational programs being offered in rural areas list basic education, occupational training, counseling, life skill information opportunities, and economic development initiatives being offered through formal postsecondary classes, on-site industrial training, telecommunications, individualized study, and other delivery strategies. A review of specific educational projects nationwide indicates the diversification of programs and agencies serving the rural adult. This paper takes the position that the problems of rural education go beyond the issue of availability of resources. The number of different agencies now serving rural communities has led to duplication of effort, territoriality, fragmentation, and lack of continuity in time.

The community education facilitation model offers one strategy for ensuring local involvement in educational planning and collaboration among the various service agencies. Educational leadership is provided by a community board and an agency that serves as educational facilitator. Composed of local community leaders, the community board assists in defining community needs, accessing funding sources within the community, and gaining community-wide support of educational efforts. The educational facilitator coordinates the educational services available to respond to the local needs identified.

The role of local educational facilitator can be filled by a variety of agencies—the public school system, public libraries, the Cooperative Extension Service, local civic organizations, or external coordinative offices sponsored by private foundations, state-created ad hoc committees, and professional associations. The single agency best suited to the role, however, is the community college. Created to provide accessible and accredited postsecondary programs in response to local needs, the community college best combines an understanding of the local community with broader regional, state, and national resources. Disadvantages to the use of community colleges in such a role include the continuing struggle between academic and community service missions in most colleges and the external perception that the community college would use such a role to bolster its enrollments at the expense of other collaborative agencies.

Coordinating the educational resources available to meet local needs involves establishing linkages among diverse agencies. For the agencies involved, collaboration allows them to expand their resource base, become more efficient in responding to local needs, and develop more innovative solutions to local problems. Barriers to successful linkages include perceptions that: (1) the more powerful members exert self-serving influences, (2) the agencies are competing for clientele, and (3) the status quo must be maintained. Successful linkages work best when each member feels itself a full partner, accruing benefit to itself as well as contributing significantly to the accomplishment of a mutual goal. Such linkages are operating effectively in southwest Georgia. Regional and statewide linkages that are currently operating include the State University of New York—Public Service Network, the Illinois Interagency Network, New Hampshire Continuing Education, the Warren/Forest Cooperative College Program, and the Minnesota Project Enlist.

The call in education for rural adults today is not for more innovative programs, but for focused initiative productive of tangible results on the local, state, and national levels. The call is for the elimination of barriers to educational programs such as territoriality, complex bureaucratic formulations, and inequitable funding. And the call is for interagency collaboration and the flexible systematology that once in place can ensure the accessibility of needed educational opportunities for rural adults.

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Forming a Rural Clearinghouse

Complex problems inevitably require complex solutions. Given the diversity of participants, no single set of conclusions could do justice to the contributions each saw themselves or their organizations making on behalf of rural adult education. Consensus was reached on the need for a clearinghouse to support improvements in rural practice and to act as an advocate in rural adult education issues. The activities to be undertaken by the clearinghouse synthesize many of the needs expressed at conference sessions.

1. Disseminate Effective Models: Effective practice in a rural setting is different. Educational providers were unanimous in the need for a dissemination effort specific to rural problems. The clearinghouse will collect information on effective models and disseminate it to rural practitioners throughout the country.

2. Develop New Models: New models are needed if education is to address the more serious problems of rural illiteracy, rural economic development, or technology transfer. Focused networks of educational providers will be formed around specific issues, in order to explore and build new models and offer a network from which to disseminate new strategies.

3. Provide Forums for Exchange: Rural providers from the entire range of institutions concerned with rural adults value opportunities to exchange information regionally and nationally. The clearinghouse will continue to sponsor conferences and regional efforts to facilitate these exchanges.

4. Advocate Rural Needs: Representatives from national associations, funding agencies, and legislative organizations expressed the need for information that will enable them to respond more effectively to rural needs. The clearinghouse will take on an advocacy role, distributing information to the public and encouraging them to consider rural needs in future, as well as ongoing work.

The Next Step

The conference concluded with the call for a national clearinghouse to support efforts in improving the educational resources being made available to adults living in rural areas. The Action Agenda Project will be guiding those efforts. If you or a representative of your organization would like to become a part of those efforts, please contact:

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Publications

A number of publications have evolved from the project's efforts on behalf of rural adult postsecondary education. The Action Agenda Project is pleased to make these publications available to interested individuals at cost.

Proceedings on the National Invitational Meeting on Rural Postsecondary Education (1981)

Inventory of Model Programs in Rural Adult Postsecondary Education (1985)

A Demographic Portrait of Rural Adult Learners (1985)

Directory of Consultants for Rural Adult Postsecondary Education (1985)

Private Funding Resources for Rural Adult Postsecondary Education (1985)

Proceedings on Serving the Rural Adult: Four Regional Conferences (1985)

Proceedings of National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education (1987)

Proceedings of National Invitational Conference on Rural Adult Postsecondary Education (1987)

Unsettling of the Midwest: Education's Response to the Rural Crisis (available December 1987)

Education's Response to the Rural Crisis: Model Programs in the Midwest (available December 1987)

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